

## MICROFINANCE IN NIGER: A MEANS TO PROMOTE WOMEN'S ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE AND THE COUNTRY'S ADVANCEMENT

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The purpose of this research is to stimulate Nigerien women's active participation in the country's advancement through the use of proven micro-finance methodologies and framework. Out of the 14.7 million Nigerien inhabitants, 63% live below the poverty line, and 43% of men are literate compared to 15% of women. Furthermore, in 2009, net primary school enrollment was 54%, with only 40% graduating. Low literacy rates hinder women's economic and social mobility, thus considerably minimizing the impact of their active participation in the country's development. While women's lack of education is in some ways attributable to early marriages and religious beliefs, further investigation through review of literature and qualitative inquiry in the form of interviews of girls and women are needed to uncover other factors involved, their consequences, and to discover effective ways to address these gender inequities. Subsequently, this study will focus on identifying and investigating microfinance models that are successful in developing countries that share the same demographics as Niger. Additionally, the psychological and socio-economic impact of microloans on women will be investigated. Finally, the role that international organisms such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, play in the efforts for poor countries such as Niger to attain economic stability will be investigated.

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